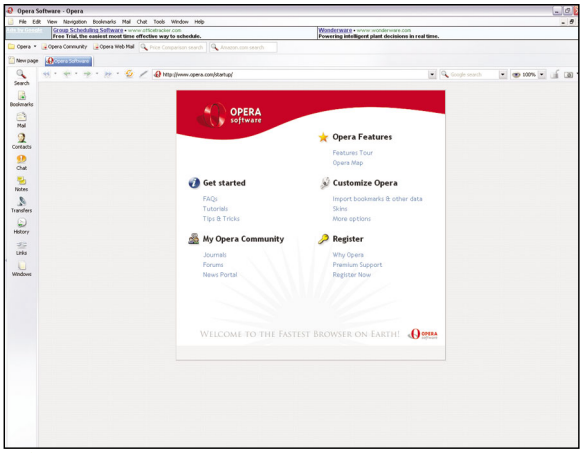
Opera Software Opera 7.52



Opera 7.52
$39 or free ad-supported version
Opera Software
www.opera.com

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It's time to ditch Internet Explorer forever. IE, the Web browser that an estimated 81% of Internet users still use, simply isn't safe. CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team) and the Department of Homeland Security both say its security is woefully lacking. You could go through a myriad of updates to make it somewhat safer, but don't bother—a number of quality alternative browsers are available. Opera (at version 7.52 as of this writing) is among the best.

Thoughtful touches lacking in IE make Opera a joy to use, including tabbed browsing, a pop-up ad blocker, and a skinnable interface. A Zoom feature lets you view a Web page at 20% to 1,000% of its original size, making small print much easier to read. When you launch the program, it can start your browsing session on your home page or a blank page or you can opt to start by continuing with the pages you were viewing during your last session or with a session you've saved. In addition, there's easy, customizable access to your favorite search engines. For example, typing **e laptop** or **r Opera** in the Address bar will search eBay and Google Groups, respectively, for those search terms.

In addition to the standard Back and Forward icons in the toolbar, Opera includes Rewind and Fast-forward buttons. The Rewind button returns you to the page that linked you to the current site (even if that was several clicks ago), and the Fast-forward button zips you to the next page you're likely to browse. For example, if you're reading a long article at an online magazine, the Fast-forward button loads the next page of that article.

The program also supports mouse gestures, which, if you take a few minutes to learn, can speed up your navigation around the Web. Some gestures are rather intuitive, including one in which you hold down the left mouse button while clicking the right to go to the next page. Others have a steeper learning curve. To open a link in a new background tab, move the mouse pointer to that link and while holding down the right button, move the mouse down and then up. With a bit of practice, gestures turn out to be a great tool for power users.

It's not fair to call Opera just a Web browser; it's really a suite that includes integrated email, a contact manager, an RSS newsreader, and an IRC client. (The last two are new in version 7.5.) These features can be handy and occasionally elegant, but some users will prefer to stick with standalone clients, which often provide more thorough feature sets. The email client does include IMAP support and can import email addresses from other apps. The IRC client is passable, with support for file transfers and graphical smileys, but it doesn't challenge any of the better standalone chat clients. Opera claims to support spell checking, but the feature actually requires separate installation of Aspell (aspell.sourceforge.net), an open-source spell checker. The email client does include spam handling that's greatly improved over the previous version.

The Web browser isn't without hitches. Although it works perfectly with most Web sites, a JavaScript menu at www.cpumag.com didn't display at all, and Opera doesn't work with Google's Gmail service. The interface also is sometimes overly complex. For instance, there are three search fields and four versions of the Reload command. First-time users will need to do a bit of setup, including enabling the pop-up blocker (which is disabled by default), decluttering the customizable toolbar, and delousing the overstocked default bookmark list.

Opera is available for Windows, Linux, FreeBSD, Solaris, and Mac OS X. You can pay $39 for the program or opt for the free, ad-supported version. With the free version, you can choose the type of ads you'll see: either relevant textual ads via Google AdWords or a random selection of banner ads.

If you're ready to abandon IE, Opera isn't the only alternative. There's also Firefox, Mozilla, and Maxthon, among others. Opera is a laudable contender in a new generation of browser wars and one that is worth a test drive. It's fast, feature-packed, highly customizable, and more secure than tired, old Internet Explorer. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

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CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect